

Investing in Beginning Teachers— The California Model

The California Formative Assessment & Support System for Teachers is the largest state-supported reform effort to improve teaching. At the core of the program are mentoring relationships, new teaching standards, and formative assessment tools.

Everyone in California is talking about improving public education. Although that's not necessarily news, what is unique about the current dialogue is the notion that improved schools will come about only in tandem with improved teaching. *The Sacramento Bee* (1998) emphasizes, "Without more good teachers, none of the many bromides proposed for school improvement—nor all of them together—will return California's public schools to the excellence they once achieved." In a state that will hire 265,000 new teachers in the next five years, crafting policies for sustaining teaching quality requires accounting for the complexities of educating 5.8 million children in 1,000 school districts—and accounting for the different needs of teachers as learners.

Policies for addressing teacher quality have been in development for several years, and the state has enacted key legislative reforms in the last two years.

In 1998–99, California allocated \$67.2 million to the Beginning Teacher Support & Assessment Program; the proposed budget for 1999–2000 is \$75 million. In addition, the state allocates \$80 million to the state mentor teacher program, which provides additional support. Reforms affecting the recruitment and retention of beginning teachers include the establishment of a new statewide teacher recruitment center, changes in teacher credentialing to include a two-year induction program for a final professional credential, and the redefinition and expansion of the statewide Beginning Teacher Support & Assessment (BTSA) Program to meet that requirement.



A beginning teacher reviews the CFASST 1 Class, School, District, and Community Profile with her mentor and the local program director.

By July 1, 1999, each first- and second-year credentialed teacher in California will be able to participate in this massive state-supported program, although the credentialing requirement will not yet be implemented. By focusing their efforts on beginning teachers, California's policymakers hope to set new standards of teaching and to assist new teachers in examining their teaching in relation to newly adopted standards for student achievement.

A System to Support Quality Teaching

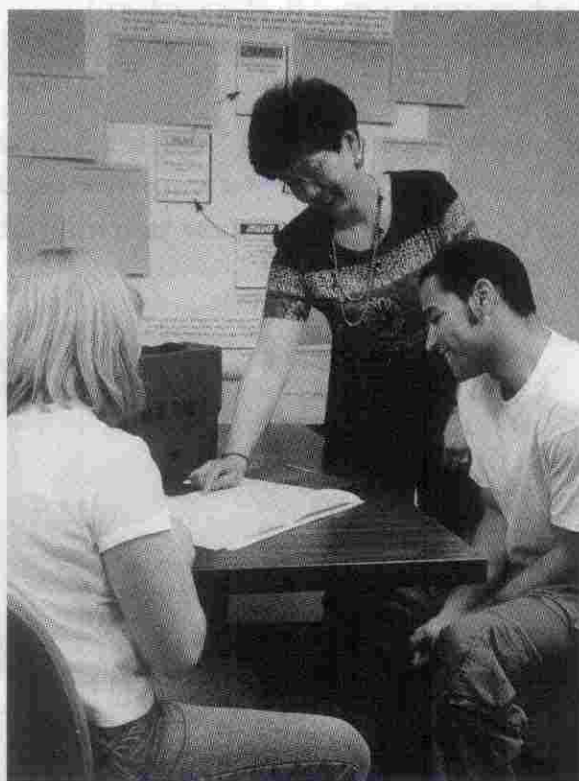
Meeting such a lofty goal requires unique tools and strong collaboration—among university faculty, district and site administrators, experienced teachers, researchers, and staff developers. Developed jointly by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the California Department of Education, and the Educational Testing Service, the California Formative Assessment & Support System for Teachers (CFASST) is the first tool to emerge from this policy effort. Currently in

the first year of a two-year field test, CFASST is a structured, systematic formative assessment process for beginning teachers and support providers that rests on two essential building blocks for teaching quality that supports student achievement.

The first building block is to encourage new and veteran teachers to use a common language to talk about teaching. The California Standards for the Teaching Profession describe six domains of teaching that serve as a lexicon for professional dialogue. Each standard is further divided into five or six elements. Using the teaching standards fosters an environment in which teachers reflect on teaching in a collegial manner. A beginning teacher can enter such a conversation with curiosity about personal teaching effectiveness and leave with an understanding of what worked well during a lesson and what was missing or mishandled. Before they engage in the next lesson series, teachers know which elements of their practice they should emphasize or change, which elements need special attention, and where to obtain additional resources. They experience the initial self-assessment of their teaching practice through the standards-based exchange.

The second building block to quality is to provide a common set of scales that describe teaching practice at different levels in light of the teaching standards. In CFASST, these scales are called the Descriptions of Practice. There is a scale for each element of each standard (35 altogether); the scales present four levels of practice from "practice not consistent with standard expectations" to "experienced practice that exemplifies the standard" (see fig. 1).

Once teachers are comfortable with verbally examining their teaching



Beginning teachers participate in a variety of activities with their CFASST support provider.

through the standards and their component elements, they can begin to address the quality of their practice by looking at specific evidence. Evidence consists of teaching products, such as lesson plans, student work, reflective writing, and observation feedback, analyzed in relation with one or more elements of the teaching standards. By comparing the evidence to the appropriate element or practice description, teachers can assess current practice and look ahead to what their teaching may become. In this way, the scales provide a road map to professional growth.

Together, the teaching standards and the practice descriptions frame teachers' understanding of their work and support metacognition on the complex act of teaching—but the standards are not in themselves sufficient to sustain teacher quality. An ongoing systematic approach to examining

teaching in relation to student learning is necessary. Teaching flourishes when teachers constantly reflect on their daily practice, when they have a means of knowing whether an instructional strategy worked, whether individual students as well as the whole class have met the intended learning goals, and how to make specific connections between their teaching goals and student outcomes.

Components of CFASST

The California Formative Assessment & Support System for Teachers is such a system. Based on a common language, it engages teachers in meaningful investigations of teaching topics, focuses teachers on identifying strengths and weaknesses, and is implemented in a collaborative environment. Implemented within the context of local programs to support beginning teachers, CFASST is *formative* assessment—

that is, assessment for the purpose of improving practice, not for formal teacher evaluation. Beginning teachers and their support providers engage in structured assessment tasks over a two-year period; these tasks require veterans and novices to reflect together on student achievement. The formative assessment system relies on two assessment modes for collecting evidence of teaching—formal peer observations and structured inquiries—and the Individual Induction Plan for mapping future professional development.

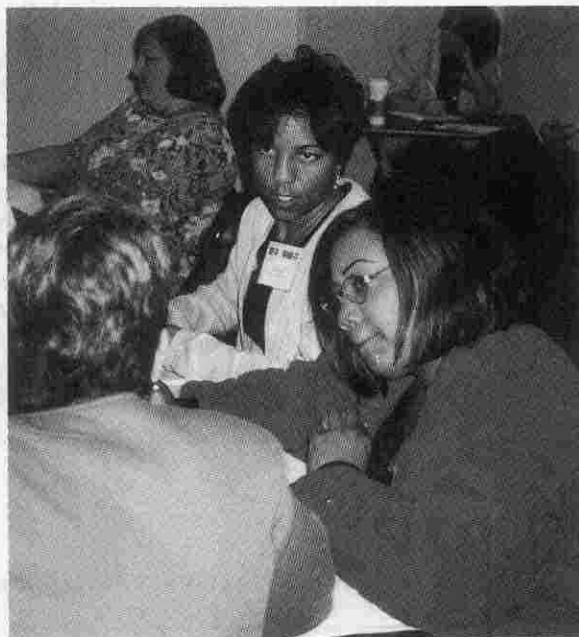
Whether engaged in inquiries or observations, beginning teachers follow a cycle of *planning, teaching, reflecting, and applying* as they assess aspects of their teaching with their support providers. First-year teachers complete two classroom observations (including lesson planning, the observation itself, and reflective writing on the

lesson, based on five of the six teaching standards). They also work on three inquiries: One inquiry is based on the standard "Establishing an Environment for Student Learning"; the second inquiry examines an instructional experience that looks across two standards, "Planning and Designing Learning Experiences for All Students" and "Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning"; and the third inquiry is based on student assessment aligned with the standard "Assessing Student Learning."

To better understand local context, teachers complete a profile of their class, school, district, and community at the start of the year. At the end of the year, they share their learning with their peers at a colloquium by making short presentations of their work culled from their CFASST evidence.

Effective implementation of the system requires extensive professional development for support providers and beginning teachers alike. Through the Beginning Teacher Support & Assessment Program, support providers participate in more than 50 hours of training in how to mentor a new teacher, use the teaching standards, and use the formative assessment system with their beginning teachers. These veteran teachers gain new skills in observing classrooms, examining products of teaching through the standards and descriptions of practice, and assessing teaching (including their own) in relation to student achievement. They often comment that their own learning about teaching is as great as or greater than that of the beginning teachers. During the 1998-99 year, nearly 6,000 veteran teachers have been trained in the use of CFASST; approximately 10,000 beginning teachers have participated.

California's policy-makers hope to set new standards of teaching quality at the outset of a teaching career.



What Do Teachers Think?

Will it work? Can it work? Does it work? An extensive evaluation plan examines feedback from multiple perspectives—beginning teachers, support providers, staff developers, and local BTSA program directors. We have received open-ended feedback from support providers throughout California on the first two CFASST events—the Class, School, District, and Community Profile and the Inquiry on Creating an Environment for Student Learning.

Clearly, the first CFASST event provides the opportunity to establish a collegial environment to examine teaching, as we hoped it would. Writing on the Class, School, District, and

Community Profile, a support provider from Monterey says,

This activity opens up a dialogue and guides questions with a specific focus. We discussed more than was asked for. The questions led to other questions. This activity provides an opportunity to problem-solve together—I didn't have all the answers. It was a great way to begin our time together, learning together.

A San Diego teacher working with three beginning teachers says,

This focused all four of us on our task—researching what our classrooms, schools, and communities look like and how we can find answers. It was also a good opening for us to get to know one another better—what's important to us, what our classrooms look like.

A Sacramento support provider commented that the demands of teaching often overwhelm new teachers before they fully understand the school culture and available resources. This event forced both her and her beginning teacher to focus.

The need to focus was on the minds of the educators who created the inquiry on classroom environments. Occurring in late September or early October, the inquiry asks beginning teachers to talk with and observe colleagues in their classrooms and then to make some changes in their own. Support providers informally observe the teacher's practice before and after the teacher implements the change. A support provider from Beverly Hills commented that the inquiry was

highly appropriate because the beginning teacher needed, but thought he didn't have time to work on, the physical environment. He had student behavior in hand, but needed to learn how to create an environment to support learning. This event opened the dialogue and

kept close contact with teachers. . . . Also it just helped to give us ideas, think about materials.

From East Los Angeles, a support provider for three beginning teachers at a year-round school thought that the informal observations were a real plus. She said,

The activities forced the beleaguered beginning teachers to stop, take stock, reflect, and apply or reapply new strategies and alternative techniques. The process also helps beginning teachers access successes and notice improvements in student learning, some gradual, others prompted by the support provider who is not there every day.

Ongoing Support for Quality Teaching

Although CFASST will not ensure quality teaching, it can offer a way to systematically support improved teaching. The best way to increase student academic achievement is to put

qualified and quality-minded teachers in classrooms. Teachers with reflective habits of mind are constantly grappling with how to best address the varied academic, social, and emotional needs of their students. Teachers who look at student work to inform teaching choices are teachers who can have an impact on student achievement.

The formative assessment and support system does provide an ongoing process of structured learning and thinking about teaching that scaffolds these essential connections. California policymakers and educators have determined that investing in teachers, and providing a tool to examine teaching over time, is the path to increased success for students and teachers alike. ■

References

Danielson, C. (1996). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. First, teacher quality—Public to

lawmakers: Put teaching on top of agenda. (1998, November 22). *Sacramento Bee*, p. F04.

Authors' note: In summer 1999, a national version of CFASST, organized around the components in *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 1996), will be available through the Educational Testing Service. Closely following the California model, the "Induction Program" offers training for mentors and site administrators, as well as structured activities for mentors and beginning teachers to develop professional skill and to bridge the gap between university professional preparation and the challenges of daily classroom teaching.

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FIGURE 1

Description of Practice (one example)

Creating and Maintaining Effective Environments for Student Learning

Element	Practice Not Consistent with Standard Expectations	Developing Beginning Practice	Maturing Beginning Practice	Experienced Practice That Exemplifies the Standard
Creating a physical environment that engages all students	The physical environment does not support student learning. There are one or more safety hazards, and materials are difficult to access when needed.	The physical environment is arranged for safety and accessibility, and it facilitates individual student engagement in learning.	The arrangement of the physical environment ensures safety and accessibility. Most students work well individually or together as they participate in learning activities.	The arrangement of the physical environment ensures safety and accessibility and facilitates constructive interaction and purposeful engagement for all students in learning activities.

Note: The Descriptions of Practice are neither traditional rubrics nor developmental scales. Each category can represent multiple ideas about teaching, and the categories are not equidistant. Copyright © 1998 by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the California Department of Education. All rights reserved. Portions copyrighted by Educational Testing Service.

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